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Title

Media: some love it, some hate it, some can’t live without it, and some can’t stand to be around it. Whatever view you have on the media—social media, television, news channels, the radio, magazines, and anything else in between—the media is an inevitable aspect of today’s society that greatly influences and affects millions of people. The media has changed far and wide over time; it has become much more prevalent, and one can barely go anywhere in public without seeing at least one form of media. It’s nearly impossible to find a person in today’s age who does not have at least one: Facebook, twitter, Instagram, or snapchat. Believe it or not, the media affects us more than we think. What may seem to be a nonchalant, daily scroll through our Facebook feeds can influence how we think, feel, and act in regards to what we are viewing.

A particularly interesting area of focus involves parents and how social media affects how they interact with their children; more specifically, how parents talk to their children, what they allow them to do, what advice they give their children, and their overall relationship with their children. This paper discusses how parents, new or experienced, are using the media to do things such as receive parenting advice, receive self-help and knowledge on how to react in certain situations involving their children, and ultimately how the media influences how they raise their children.

Not just in regards to parenting, but to life in general as well, most people want to come up on top; they want to be “the best”; they want to succeed and rise above others. The media does a fine job of putting parenting in the public eye, telling parents what they can do to be “the best parent they can be”, and giving them a hard time for being a “bad parent.” The media has strong positive and negative impact on parents and their interactions with their children, and this paper discusses the topic in great depth.

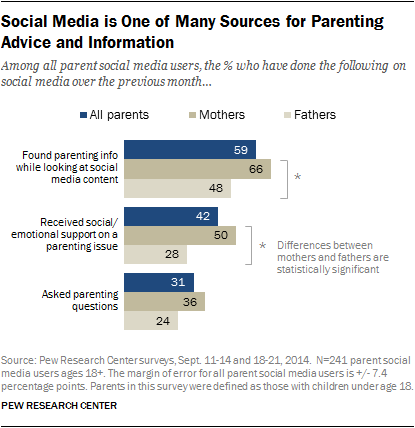
LITERATURE REVIEW

The main take away from my secondary sources is that the media is indeed influencing parents—in positive and negative ways alike. The most frequent findings from a variety of sources for the ways in which the media is doing parents a favor include having a surefire way of staying in touch with children and a generation of discussion and bonding time due to some of the information portrayed by the media. The Harvard Center for Health Communication conducted a two-year project in which they gathered and analyzed data regarding the role of mass media in parenting education from sources such as research studies, press reports, media project samples, and over 200 interviews. A. Simpson, the lead researcher of the project stated that “the media, are a potentially important tool in supporting and informing parents” due to the conclusions that: parenting has become a staple among topics in many print media; parenting initiatives within the electronic media are expanding; the demand for media information among parents is substantial and increasing (1).

Despite a few positives, Simpson goes on to say that “a number of drawbacks seriously undermine the ability of the media to contribute effectively to the well-being of parents and families,” including scattered information on parenting topics, the parenting advice portrayed by the media is often conflicting and confusing, parents of adolescents receive less information and support from the media than parents of younger children, and that entertainment television has been largely overlooked in regards to being a source of influence on parenting and as a way to support and/or inform parents (1).

Children look up to their parents, mimic their words and actions, and observe them even when the parent least expects it. A key article from the Huffington Post “How Technology Keeps You from Being the Parent you need to Be” discusses how parents are inevitably role models for their children, so they need to set good examples. Leibovich, the Executive Lifestyle Editor of the Post, states that “many parents yell at their kids to get off their screens—while simultaneously typing a message to a colleague or “liking” something a friend from high school posted on Facebook” (1). Recently, media has been notorious for taking away parents’ quality time with their children; parents are forgetting that they are actually important to their families, and that their children deserve more attention than their smartphones. Ultimately, the media is becoming a distraction to both parents and children, and it takes away personal interactions that would occur otherwise.

Parents rely on the media for advice and tips. A study from the Pew Research Center found that of parents who use social media and have children under the age of 18, 8 out of 10 said they find helpful information through social networking sites. Also, roughly one-third of parents who use social media said that they crowdsourced parenting advice and questions recently, and moms and dads were just as likely to do so (Santhanam 1). Although parents are supposedly receiving parenting help, much of the information presented by the media is often confusing and conflicting.

*[](http://www.pewinternet.org/2015/07/16/parents-and-social-media/pi_2015-07-16_parents-and-social-media_12/)*

The figure shows the percentage of parents (mothers, fathers, and both) who have found parenting info, received social/emotional support on a parenting issue, and asked parenting questions through social media over a one month period.

The percentages for those who found parenting info while looking at social media content and for those who received social/emotional support on a parenting issue have significant statistical differences between mothers and fathers. The clear majority of parents found info while looking at social media content, half of mothers and 42% of fathers received social/emotional support on a parenting issue, and about 1/3 of mothers and fathers asked parenting questions.

The importance of the data is to show that overall, social media plays a fairly large role in providing parenting advice, support, or questions for parental users. This is important because we need to consider the content of all of this so-called advice and support. Who determines if the information is good or bad and how parents ‘should be’ interacting with their children? The information is undoubtedly out there, and parents are certainly using social media as a way to communicate with other parents about parenting itself.

The media tries to give advice on specific issues, and what one source says can totally contradict another. For example, recent claims about the value and the risks of spanking can be found from source to source, and from expert to expert. Researchers, practitioners, the media, policy makers, and parents have all been irritated in their efforts to seek reliable information from each other (Simpson 1). What one person says may be true in their eyes, and what another person says may also be true from their perspective, so which advice should the parent take? Much of what is in the media is biased and based on personal experience and opinion, and this is a major problem for parents trying to seek “correct” information.

Another part of media that affects parent-child interactions is what is being posted, and easy access to those posts. Parents might think that what they post on social media is confidential from their children, and vice versa, but nowadays, it takes less than a minute to find someone on social media and access their posts. There is a real problem in the sense that parents and kids are posting things without thinking twice, and it is ruining their reputations. Parents may post about a coworker, an annoying parent, or a bad day at work, and their kids can view this. Likewise, parents can find their kids and their posts on social media and see what they are doing, where they could have been, and who they are with (Krzak 1). This is bad because parents and children can catch each other in lies, or see an inappropriate post that they don’t want to necessarily see, posted by someone they love and trust. In the article “How Social Media Forever Changed Parenting” one mother discusses how she checks up on her kids. She says, “I can stalk my kids with only a laptop and a cup of coffee. I can see every transaction in their bank accounts and every text or call on their cell phones. I can see their friends’ FB pages and twitter feeds, as well as that of their teachers. Photos, stories and videos of their actions will stream my way and I cannot help but feel a little sorry for them. I am not sure I would have wanted my parents to have had such a window into my teen life. My ability, should I have chosen to spy on them from the confines of my living room, is almost limitless” (1). She goes on to say that if she can stalk them in such an extensive way, they can certainly do the same, and that if she “has regrets, hopefully google can’t find them.” (“How Social Media Forever Changed Parenting”). This is frightening, because within seconds and within the click of a view buttons, parents and kids can find out virtually whatever they want about the other.

Social media brings about stress, whether it’s due to a regretful post, or seeing something that affects your whole day and mood. In an attempt to synthesize new parents’ use of Facebook during the transition into parenthood, surveys regarding the matter were conducted by 154 mothers and 150 fathers. It was found that mothers had more frequent visits to Facebook accounts and more frequent management of content, and each of these were associated with higher levels of parenting stress (Bartholomew 456).

The majority of parents want the best for their children, and they want to do what is best in regards to raising their child and still managing to maintain a good relationship with him or her. It is interesting to see how parents describe their parenting styles, what they see as a good parent, and how they portray themselves as a parent. A study published in the *Journal of Men’s Studies* “Constructing Men as Fathers” explores popular portrayals of fatherhood as conceptualized in articles from five parenting magazines. Traditionally, the father provides for the family financially, and the mother cares for her children and takes care of the home. Depictions of fathers fell into categories supportive of hegemonic masculinity that emphasized men’s breadwinning identities over their roles as parents. Many of the articles revolved around men’s route to fatherhood, and many men were put in ambiguous situations where they struggled to establish their parental legitimacy. The findings show that fathers who internalize these portrayals of fatherhood from popular media may not view themselves as true parents if they do not see themselves positively represented in generalist parenting depictions (Schmitz). This is relevant and good evidence because it blatantly shows that parents are taking what the media says and does, and formulating opinions about themselves as a parent.

PRIMARY RESEARCH METHODS AND FINDINGS

For my primary research, I interviewed my mom, Terri Knapp, and my neighbor, Carla Garbo. Both are middle-aged parents, my mom with three children, and my neighbor with two children. I hoped to find out information regarding their views on the media, how they think the media affects parents and children/teens, how they believe media and its influences have changed over time, and how they feel information portrayed in the media should be discussed between parents and children.

In my interviews, I got some solid support that shows the good and the bad of how the media affects parents. Both women reported mixed feelings about social media, saying that the negatives outweigh the positives. The negatives include straying away from face-to-face social interactions, misinterpretations of information, gossiping, and with social media, bullying. The positives that they mentioned include it being an easy communication method and a fast and easy way to spread the word about an event or something similar. My mom said that she believes that much of what is in the media is overridden with biases. She gave the example of politics, saying that if someone has a liberal viewpoint, they will most likely watch a news channel that has a liberal reporter. The importance of this is that people only hear what they want to hear; they don’t just get the facts, they get information that has a specific bias, and one that they agree with, strapped to it.

Pertaining to themselves and how they talk to their children about what is portrayed in the media, both women said that they definitely discuss the events and information. Parents need to step in and provide guidance on what is being relayed over social media and news reports. My mom gave the example that when major events—usually national or global, like terrorist attacks or shootings—occur, it gives her a chance to discuss what is going on in the world with her kids. “I want to share with my kids what is going on in the world and make them aware. Media does not affect the how, but it affects the what, regarding the conversation with my kids” (Knapp). The media can discuss some really tough topics, and both parents shared the same opinion such that discussing hard topics, like race issues, abortion, or politics, is good because it gives them as parents a chance to share their own views and guide their children’s own ideas on the topic.

Most things in the world change over time and media is definitely one of them. Carla said she believes that these days, media has actually taken over some people’s lives. She gave the example that when she goes to eat in a restaurant, she sees young children playing on electronic devices, and years ago, that would have never been the case. Carla said that “traditionally, I always thought going to a restaurant was a privilege, and a chance to talk with my family about our days and our lives. Nowadays, you see a family of 5, and they’ve all got their phones out, they’re all staring at a screen, and not a single one of them is talking. It’s sad.” Her final comment on media was that people are becoming dependent on it and thriving on it, and the idea of a social being is diminishing (Garbo).   
DISCUSSION

From my primary and secondary sources, it can be concluded that the media affects parents, children, and the way parents interact with their children more negatively than positively. The media has most definitely changed over time, and we can see the effects of it on most people today. So why the change? Why have parents shifted their focus from their children to the media, and why is the media so influential on parent-child relationships and interactions?

Like all of the information from secondary sources, the media is everywhere; many people in the United States have access to most forms of media at their fingertips. Like anything else that we as humans repetitively do, the media becomes an addiction, a habit. Parents find that they have to be on their phones, they need to watch the news, and their children can go do something else, which is probably media-related. Because parents are not setting the best examples when it comes to genuine conversation or true quality time with their children, children are learning to do the same by way of this parental example. Parents may not even realize they are doing so, but it is slowly affecting the way they interact with their children.

Overall, the media is something that is a huge part of today’s society, and it is specifically impacting the way parents interact with their children. Parents use the media as a means of getting information and advice regarding parenting, and much of that information is skewed. The media, particularly social media, is allowing parents and children to creep on each other and possibly find things out that they do not want to about one another. The media is a source for misinterpretation of local, national, and global news, and much of what is portrayed though media is biased. The media is ultimately weakening the bond between parents and their children, and society is letting it happen.

(conclusion)

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